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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, March 11, 1940.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FOOD STANDARDS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Consumers can help the Federal Food and Drug Administration in setting up new food standards under the new Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The government is really asking housewives and any other interested consumers to express their opinions as to what is meant by "bread", or "ice cream", or "jam", or any one among scores of other ordinary foodstuffs sold throughout this country.

For example, the Food Standards Committee, made up of 2 men from the Food and Drug Administration and 4 state officials, held a meeting about a month ago. They invited manufacturers, consumer organizations, individual consumers, and regulatory food officials, and anybody else interested, to come in and make suggestions about the definitions and standard of identity for certain foods.

(That term, "standard of identity" simply means what the food is.)

The foods considered at the meeting were oleomargarine, canned fruits for salad, canned fruit cocktail, and bread. Bread included whole wheat, raisin, and milk bread. The Food Standards Committee had studied each of these items for some time to determine a standard definition of just what people can fairly expect to get when they buy a package labeled with the name of one of these foods.

The fundamental purpose of the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act in establishing food standards is "promoting honesty and fair dealing in the interest of consumers." So the Food and Drug officials very much want to know what the consumer expects when she-- or he-- buys a given article in the store.

If she asks for raisin bread, just what is raisin bread? That sounds simple.

Yet people differ even on an everyday food like bread. The committee wanted to hear from the baking industry, and also from the women who make their own bread. And anyone interested, but living a long way from Washington, where the committee meetings were held, could submit recommendations and proposals in writing addressed to the Food and Drug Administration.

The committee compares the consumer's, the manufacturer's and the distributor's idea of bread before it proposes any definition or standard for, say, raised bread. Then the proposals, based on the general opinions gathered will be discussed again at a public hearing before recommendations are made as to a standard of identity and definition for that particular food. It is especially important that consumers appear at these hearings, for it is on the testimony recorded at the hearings that final standards are really based.

The first food to have a standard under the Food and Drug Act was butter. This standard, which was specially enacted by Congress in 1923, requires among other things that butter should contain not less than 80 percent butter fat.

Under the Food Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938, standards are authorized for practically all foods and several have already been promulgated -- for egg product, canned tomatoes, tomato paste, tomato puree, tomato catsup, tomato juice and numerous canned foods, such as apricots, cherries, pears, and peaches, peas and forty other vegetables.

A point which is not always understood is the meaning of the term "standard" in setting up definitions for foods. The popular idea of a "standard" is that the word refers to a very high grade. The Food Standards Committee is not concerned with difference of quality, but with identity. It tries to determine the consumer's understanding of the nature of the product -- what ingredients the consumer thinks are in it when he buys it. Again, the standards committee is not concerned with calories, vitamins, or questions of that sort. The consumer who wants to know

whether one food contains more vitamins or minerals than another must get that information from nutrition specialists.

The Food Standards Committee has to consider each food in great detail. The committee determines first what foods should be standardized; then sets about to get all possible information about them. Through the Food and Drug Administration's inspectors it investigates manufacturing plants all over the United States to see how each food is made. It tries to find out what retailers understand as a satisfactory product in each case, and what the customers expect. If it's bread, what the consumers consider a good loaf; if it's ice cream, whether they think ice cream is made entirely of cream or of cream and milk.

Meetings are held, like the one in January, at which all these viewpoints are discussed, and it is here that the consumer -- which means you and I and our neighbors -- has a definite chance to help. After the meetings, the committee draws up proposals for exact standards of identity or definitions of the different foods. The proposals are presented at a final hearing. It is at this hearing that consumers are particularly needed so that the record will contain direct evidence of their views. After everybody concerned has had ample time for comment and criticism, the Secretary of Agriculture will issue an order which makes the standard official.

The Secretary has also published a list of more than 15 foods for which, it is noted, standards will be set up during the next couple of years. In the meantime these foods will not have to declare their ingredients on the label.

Any consumer who wants more information on food standards can get it by writing directly to the Food and Drug Administration. And don't forget that the Food and Drug officials will be glad to have your opinion as a consumer whenever a discussion meeting is announced. Other foods than those mentioned will come up for consideration in the near future.

